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Curating Art Therapy: A conversation

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Abstract

This article is based on several conversations between the authors – David Edwards and Barrie Damarell – prior to and following the exhibition – '*A personal history of Art Therapy in less than 100 objects*' – held at Gallery 35, Chapel Walk, Sheffield between Monday September 10th to Saturday September 15th, 2018. The authors discuss the rationale for the exhibition, together with the process of curating it.

Keywords

Art, Art Therapy, Exhibition, History, Objects, Retirement

Fig. 1 – The authors, Dave Edwards (right) and Barrie Damarell (left)

DAMARELL:

Dave, although I have one or two ideas of my own, I wonder what gave you the impetus for curating an exhibition dedicated to art therapy in the form that you did?

EDWARDS:

I had been thinking about my relationship with 'objects' for a while prior to making the decision to proceed with the exhibition. A key moment in the process leading up to that decision was listening to the BBC Radio 4 series, *A History of the World in 100 Objects* coordinated by Neil MacGregor, then Director of the British Museum[1]. Since first hearing Neil MacGregor's radio programmes narrating human history through one hundred objects, I have been intrigued by the idea that objects can tell a story beyond that of their own making. At the heart of this exhibition is – as its title suggests – the telling of a story about the history of art therapy through objects; objects that have meaning and significance for each contributor and potentially for others too.

DAMARELL:

I can see how this might have influenced your thinking Dave but were there other resonances?

EDWARDS:

This landmark project – which is still available to listen to as a podcast via the BBC Radio iPlayer – provided both a source of inspiration and what I considered to be a catchy and accurate working title[2]. Not having access to the resources available to the British Museum, the final exhibition was inevitably going to consist of less than one hundred objects. I didn't know exactly how many submissions I would receive until quite late in the day so what was originally a working title became the actual title for the exhibition.

1 http://www.academia.edu/20085144/Neil_Macgregor_A_History_Of_The_World_In_100_Objects [Accessed 31/01/2019]

2 https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00nrtd2/episodes/downloads [Accessed 31/01/2019]

DAMARELL:

I'm interested in your philanthropic gesture to mount an exhibition on a profession, albeit one you've played in important role in?

EDWARDS:

I know that this may sound a bit glib Barrie, but I did it because it seemed like a good idea at the time, and because I could. Being semi-retired, I had the time, and having collected my NHS pension lump sum I also had the funds available to fund the exhibition. However, while that's all true, it is also an inadequate reply to your question.

DAMARELL:

The personal history of objects is very interesting to me, how did your fascination help to advance your enquiry?

EDWARDS:

For a long time, I didn't really have an answer to the question, why do it? It was just something I felt in some strange way compelled to do. Although I'd been thinking about the psychological significance of 'objects' – real and imagined – for most of my career, it was only more recently that I began to give serious consideration to the significance of particular objects in my own personal and professional life.

DAMARELL:

Dave, could you give me an example from a common interest that's apart from art therapy?

EDWARDS:

As you know Barrie, I have a life-long interest in the game of football and the fortunes of my home town club Newcastle United in particular. As I began to wind down towards retirement, one of the things I found myself increasingly thinking and writing about was what might best be described as my collection of football

memorabilia, including my Newcastle United replica shirt[3]. I also have a long-standing interest in writing and the kinds of objects used in the writing process: laptops, manual typewriters, notebooks, pens, pencils, etc. Amongst the many unfinished pieces of writing currently languishing on my laptop is one with the working title 'My Muji'; which as the title suggests concerns my relationship with the gel pens manufactured and sold by the Japanese company Muji. But I digress…

DAMARELL:

I can see a developing interest in both the personal and the wider cultural significance of objects, but why focus on art therapy and not football or writing for that matter?

EDWARDS:

That's a good question Barrie, and by no means an easy one to answer. I might well explore those things further in due course, but so far as my motives for focusing on art therapy specifically are concerned it seems to me there are several aspects to this. Firstly, although I still do a little teaching from time to time, and continue to offer some clinical supervision, I'm effectively retired from working clinically as an art therapist. Having reached this point in my life I found myself reflecting on my time in the profession as well as beginning to look forward into the future. Curating an exhibition on the history of art therapy allowed me to do both in a purposeful way; to reflect on my relationship with the art therapy profession while also beginning to re-engage with the art world.

DAMARELL:

I'm wondering if you might be saying that one of the tasks of the exhibition was to gather sufficient escape velocity to enable your transition from practitioner to non-practitioner?

EDWARDS:

I think so Barrie.

3 https://www.museumforobjectresearch.com/my-football-shirt/ [Accessed 31/01/2019]

DAMARELL:

As you know I retired over five years ago and I'm interested in how people manage the complexity of a change of this magnitude. One particular facet is the loss of position in the field of the gaze of the other. It seems important to me to find a new identity better suited to the new landscape that one now occupies. For me, it was important to reach into my past to reconnect with the electronic music that I experimented with in my late teens and twenties. It was definitely a case of addressing unfinished business. You see, at the time I had to prematurely curtail my activities due to financial constraints and needs. As a retired person I found I could afford the analogue equipment that was out of reach as a younger man. My 'new' identity seems to be developing out of those earlier foundations.

EDWARDS:

I share something of the impulse to address some 'unfinished business', certainly so far as my own art work is concerned. Crucially, as someone with a pension and 'free' time, I am both more empowered and more able to explore my own diverse, creative interests; including visiting art galleries and getting to see important exhibitions up and down the country and abroad. I no longer feel the need to find and follow a single path. And as a retired practitioner, I'm also less preoccupied than I once was with the emotional and creative difficulties faced by others, be they clients or colleagues. I can, in effect, be more selfish – in a good way – than previously felt possible.

DAMARELL:

Is there anything else you'd like to say about the rationale for curating the exhibition?

EDWARDS:

The rationale for the exhibition is pretty much as described in the title. The exhibition sought to present, or perhaps more accurately to represent, a personal history of art therapy. That is to say, a history that is personal to me and to those who contributed to the exhibition. I wanted to curate an exhibition that told a story – about the profession and some of the individuals who have helped shape it –

through assembling a diverse collection objects, all of which were in some way connected to art therapy.

DAMARELL:

Putting together an exhibition isn't an everyday experience for an art therapist. Could you give some insights into the process?

EDWARDS:

In late 2017 I sent an email to twenty or so art therapists or former art therapists – including yourself Barrie – inviting them to contribute to an exhibition I was proposing to organise in Sheffield at a venue yet to be identified. Each potential contributor was invited to submit a photograph or scanned drawing of a sufficiently high quality of an object – made, found, gifted, purchased or which has in some other way – had played a significant role in their professional life. Each image was to be accompanied by a brief description – no more than 500 words in length – of the reasons of choosing this object.

DAMARELL:

My guess is that one of the first acts of curatorial 'censorship' might have been how wide to cast your invitational net?

EDWARDS:

Rather than issue an open invitation, I decided to invite practicing or retired art therapists I knew personally and whom I believed would be interested in contributing to the kind of exhibition I was proposing to host. I also invited friends and acquaintances in related professions, along with current and former colleagues[4].

4 Information about all the contributors to the exhibition can be found @ https://curatingarttherapy.blogspot.com/2018/11/ [Accessed 31/01/2019]

DAMARELL:

Did your choice involve any other considerations?

EDWARDS:

So far as possible, I wanted those contributing to the exhibition to represent a cross section of the profession; from recently qualified to experienced practitioners as well as service managers, academics and retired members of the profession.

DAMARELL:

And did this work out as intended or did you suffer discomforts?

EDWARDS:

When I sent my email out into the world, I wasn't at all sure what kind of response my invitation would receive. In the end, I was fortunate to receive a positive one. Almost everyone I initially approached said they would like to contribute to the exhibition even if, in the end, not everyone did.

DAMARELL:

In my experience, people are often genuinely interested in contributing to projects but sometimes struggle to produce material. Was this an issue for you?

EDWARDS:

Unfortunately, it did indeed become an issue Barrie. I wasn't entirely sure what the final numbers would be until very late on. I had to do a bit of last-minute chivvying along in one or two cases and, sadly, several people who said they would contribute something to the exhibition when initially approached in the end didn't. I wasn't always informed of the reasons for this, but being an overworked academic was an explanation I was given on more than one occasion. Make of that what you will.

DAMARELL:

Did you have any other regrets?

EDWARDS:

Due to oversights on my part, there were some individuals who I would have liked to have invited but didn't. That remains a matter of regret. On the other hand, one or two people who heard about the exhibition through friends or colleagues invited themselves and their contributions provided a welcome addition to the final exhibition.

DAMARELL:

I should imagine curating the exhibition was quite a learning curve? When you gave your talk at the opening of the exhibition I was particularly interested on your thoughts on the role of the curator. Could you say a little more about that now?

EDWARDS:

Having wandered somewhat naively into this area it's a topic I have come to find fascinating. Having only very occasionally exhibited my art work since leaving art collage back in the late 1970s, it would be fair to say that I was a bit rusty when it came to the business of mounting an exhibition. Aside from all the practicalities involved, there was the role of curator itself to consider.

DAMARELL:

Dave, the role of the curator has risen to prominence regarding the curator's role in the manufacture of meaning. I'd value your thoughts on this?

EDWARDS:

Traditionally, a 'curator' is the custodian of a museum or other collection, while the verb 'curate' is defined as, 'To select items from among a large number of possibilities for other people to consume and enjoy; applied to many areas including music, design, fashion, and especially digital media'[5].

5 https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/curator [Accessed 31/01/2019]

DAMARELL:

These definitions suggest the words ‘curator’ and ‘curate’ have escaped the limitations of the museum and gallery?

EDWARDS:

Nowadays, it seems, you can curate just about anything. We can all be curators, and presumably through doing so our found objects and cherished travel mementos might become art, or at the very least culturally significant artefacts. Such a view might be contentious – particularly amongst those who still value the traditional functions of curating such as arbitrating on matters of taste, sensibility or connoisseurship – but it is nevertheless a popular one[6].

DAMARELL:

And why not?

EDWARDS:

Good question! Perhaps the exclusivity of curating – its traditional function of arbitrating on matters of taste, sensibility or connoisseurship – has been elitist? On the other hand, as I became increasingly aware during the process of curating my exhibition, the role of the curator has grown more and more important in recent years, with some curators becoming household names. This does sometimes appear to have eclipsed or overshadowed that of the artists whose work they are responsible for promoting. This is something I was keen to avoid and was a significant factor in my decision to allow contributors – without any intervention from myself – to self-select the work and words they submitted.

DAMARELL:

I’m going to push you a bit further on this Dave, if that’s okay? Can we think together on whether there was any conscious desire to create a frame to hold a particular meaning or perspective on art therapy? Or conversely, was there an unconscious process at large that is only visible in retrospect?

6 See David Balzer’s book *Curationism: How Curating Took Over the Art World and Everything Else* for a thoughtful critique of the trend (Balzer, 2015).

EDWARDS:

I'm with the psychoanalysts on this one Barrie. If I've learnt anything during my career as a therapist it is that we are mostly unconscious of our desires and intentions. So yes, no doubt there were unconscious processes at play when I was making my curatorial decisions, although you might be better placed to see them than I am at the present time. As for wanting to promote a particular perspective on art therapy, I think not. If anything, I want to do the opposite. It wasn't an explicit aim when I was putting the exhibition together, but I would like to open the profession up to new voices and have it defined – perhaps I mean redefined? – by its current practitioners. I've had my say, now it's time for other – younger – art therapists to make the case for what art therapy is or could be.

DAMARELL:

In order to understand the meaning and intention of projects such as yours Dave, it's often important to be aware of the monetary backing for such enterprises.

EDWARDS:

In the early stages of the project I did consider applying for financial assistance from organisations such as the Arts Council, but as anyone who has ever applied for a grant from the Arts Council or a similar organisation to help fund their work will tell you, doing so can be a frustrating and time-consuming process.

DAMARELL:

What other options did you consider?

EDWARDS:

I also considered the option of requesting donations and crowdfunding. But in the end, I opted to fund the exhibition myself, because I could afford to and because doing so allowed me to retain control. I should like to acknowledge though that a number of contributors made donations to help cover the costs and though unsolicited these were, nevertheless very welcome and much appreciated.

DAMARELL:

I'm guessing the venue you chose for the exhibition also helped keep costs manageable?

EDWARDS:

Sheffield is fortunate in having a number of accessible and affordable exhibition spaces. Of these, the one that best suited my requirements was the gallery at 35 Chapel Walk, which is located in the very heart of the city and easily accessible by public transport[7].

DAMARELL:

What about the format for the exhibition itself?

EDWARDS:

The format for the final exhibition remained as originally envisaged, and when we came to hang the exhibition the day before it opened it consisted of twenty-five uniformly framed A4 images, each accompanied by text, also A4 size.

DAMARELL:

I'm particularly interested as to why you decided to display the work in this way?

EDWARDS:

I was led by two main considerations Barrie; aesthetic and practical. As a matter of personal taste, I prefer a minimalist aesthetic. One that focusses on reducing excess (clutter) and concentrating on the essential. I also hoped that by using frames of a uniform size and colour more attention might be paid – literally and metaphorically – to the image within the frame rather than to the frame itself.

7 https://www.35chapelwalk.com/copy-of-earth [Accessed 31/01/2019]

Fig. 2 – Gallery interior, 35 Chapel Walk, Sheffield

Fig. 3 – Gallery interior, 35 Chapel Walk, Sheffield

DAMARELL:

Why did you invite contributors to submit photographs or scanned images rather than the original objects themselves?

EDWARDS:

Mainly for practical reasons to do with cost. The decision to use photographs rather than actual objects made the whole business of submitting and displaying the work easier and safer. None of the contributions required insurance for instance and the risk of anything getting stolen, lost or damaged in transit or during the exhibition was greatly reduced.

DAMARELL:

I get that, but in the spirit of Walter Benjamin and his seminal work: 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (Benjamin, 1936/2008) I wonder what might have been lost, if anything, by excluding the 'original' object?[8]

EDWARDS:

To be honest with you Barrie, it is some time since I looked at Walter Benjamin's work, so I'd not really considered this. Your point is an important one though and deserves more consideration that I can give it here. However, as Walter Benjamin himself acknowledges, the replication of images and objects by mechanical or other means is hardly new. Nevertheless, something is undeniably lost through the absence of the original object, most obviously it's uniqueness. That didn't seem to be a problem with this exhibition but I'm sure the material presence of Mark Wheeler's camera or Sonia Boue's grandmother's handbag, for example, would have added something of interest and significance. No matter how good the quality, it is not always possible to perceive the fragility of an object, or the patina it acquires through use, when looking at a photograph compared to the 'real thing'.

8 An English language translation of Walter Benjamin's 1936 essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* can be found online at https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/benjamin.htm [Accessed 31/01/2019]

Fig. 4 – ‘Canon’, Mark Wheeler

Fig. 5 – ‘My grandmother’s handbag’, Sonia Boue

DAMARELL:

And your decision to only use A4 black frames?

EDWARDS:

The A4 size frames used for this exhibition came from IKEA and, being relatively cheap, were affordable as well as being both aesthetically pleasing and lending the exhibition a degree of visual coherence. Laminating the text and presenting it using white metal binder clips performed a similar function. I originally envisaged the text being mounted, but not framed. As the exhibition evolved, however, I came to the view laminating the text was the best option. Displaying the text in this way also allowed for the possibility that spectators could take the words off the wall for closer inspection.

DAMARELL:

How did contributors respond to these limitations?

EDWARDS:

Without difficulty in most cases, although to begin with one or two people struggled to grasp the creative possibilities and benefits of the limitations I was imposing. Some contributors wanted to include more than one piece of work for instance, while others wanted to submit work larger than A4.

DAMARELL:

I wonder if we could return and discuss in a little more detail how, and from where, the idea for exhibition came about?

EDWARDS:

In the beginning, there wasn't a fully formed idea for the exhibition as such, but rather a cluster of miscellaneous thoughts and ideas, including those mentioned earlier. In retrospect it is clear to me that many of the ideas explored in this exhibition – particularly those concerning the personal and cultural significance of objects – had been hanging around in my mind for some time, even if I wasn't always aware of them. For example, as a therapist very much influenced by the work and ideas of the psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott I'd been thinking about the

role that objects – real and imagined – played in the life my clients on and off for years.

DAMARELL:

I'm assuming you are referring to Winnicott's concept of 'transitional objects' here?

EDWARDS:

As we know Barrie, throughout life certain objects may acquire powerful symbolic significance. And yes, as you say, it was Winnicott who first used the term 'transitional object' to describe the psychological significance of such objects in human development (Winnicott, 1980). A well-known example of a 'transitional object' to be found in popular culture is the comfort blanket carried by Linus in the Charles Schultz 'Peanuts' cartoons.

DAMARELL:

The psychological and cultural power and significance of transitional objects is not, of course, restricted to infancy or childhood as a very interesting article in the Guardian recently argued[9].

EDWARDS:

Indeed not Barrie. While we may, as infants or children, form a particular attachment to a toy or a piece of material, as adults an item of jewellery or clothing may assume similarly special importance. During periods of transition – such as leaving home, or following a bereavement, for example – these objects may assume even greater significance and we may become very attached to them.

9 See https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/dec/12/still-have-childhood-teddy-psychological-power-toys-we-keep?CMP=fb_gu [Accessed 31/01/2019]

DAMARELL:

This brings to mind the work of Christopher Bollas (1993), who proposed the idea that projection, traditionally considered to diminish the individual, also possesses the ability to enhance the individual through the introjection of positive personal meaning into the object in what he describes as the 'Day Space' that becomes available to the individual for further thought and meaning.

EDWARDS:

That's not an idea I am familiar with Barrie, but it is one I will certainly explore further in the future. It wasn't until quite recently that I began to reflect more deeply on the role objects have played in my own life and in the development of art therapy.

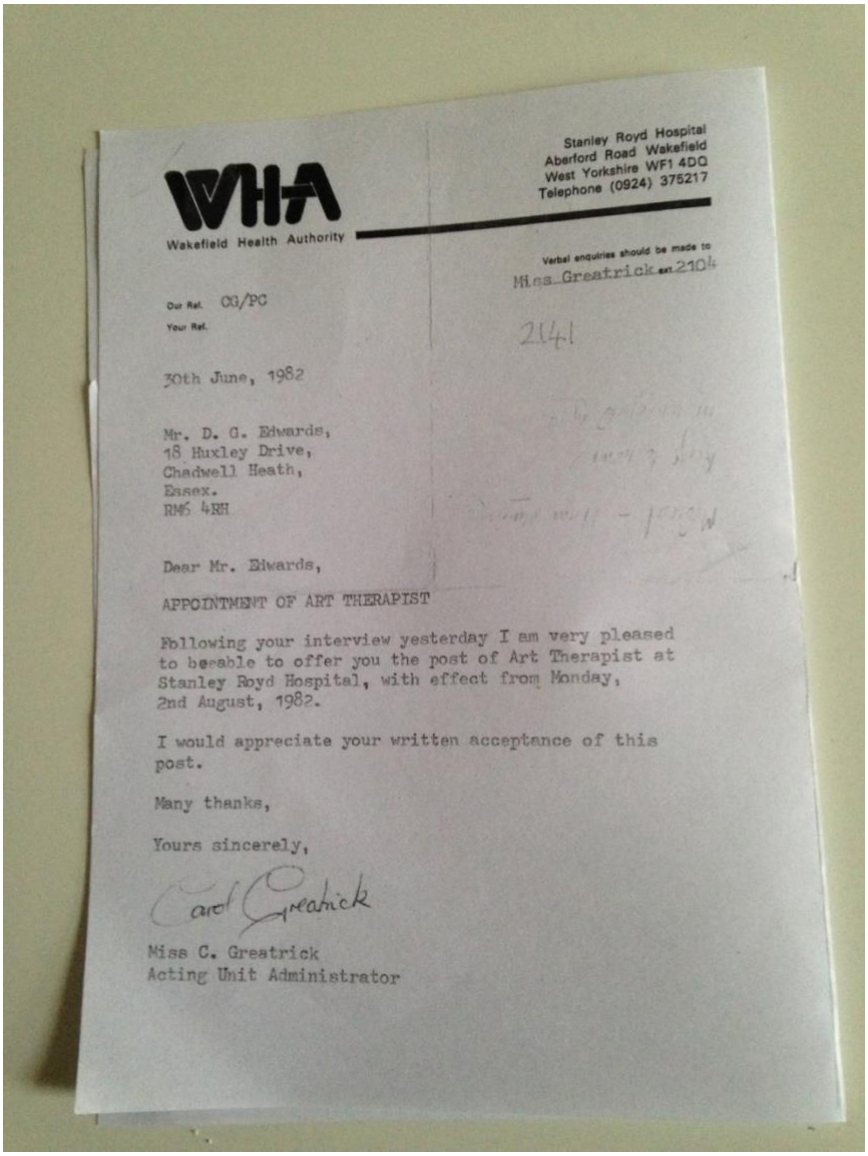
DAMARELL:

Could you perhaps say a little more about that?

EDWARDS:

Over the past four or five years I have begun to make the move out of the world of work and into retirement. I'm also in the process of moving home, from Sheffield where I currently live to North Shields where I intend to live permanently once my wife and I fully retire. Part of this process has involved sorting through boxes of stuff. The kind of stuff we acquire over a lifetime; correspondence, images, books, gifts received, miscellaneous folders and work related files and much else besides. It was while sorting through a long-forgotten box file that I came across my own contribution to the exhibition; the letter offering me my first job as an art therapist[10].

10 Further information about this letter and all the other contributions to the exhibition is available online at https://curatingarttherapy.blogspot.com/2018/09/dear-mr-edwards.html [Accessed 31/01/2019]



WHA
Wakefield Health Authority

Stanley Royd Hospital
Aberford Road Wakefield
West Yorkshire WF1 4DQ
Telephone (0924) 375217

Verbal enquiries should be made to
Miss Greatrick ext 2104

Our Ref. CG/PC
Your Ref.

241

30th June, 1982

Mr. D. G. Edwards,
18 Huxley Drive,
Chadwell Heath,
Essex.
RM6 4RH

Dear Mr. Edwards,

APPOINTMENT OF ART THERAPIST

Following your interview yesterday I am very pleased to be able to offer you the post of Art Therapist at Stanley Royd Hospital, with effect from Monday, 2nd August, 1982.

I would appreciate your written acceptance of this post.

Many thanks,

Yours sincerely,

Carol Greatrick

Miss C. Greatrick
Acting Unit Administrator

Fig. 6 – ‘Dear Mr. Edwards’, Dave Edwards

DAMARELL:

And you thought this ‘stuff’ might form the basis for an exhibition?

EDWARDS:

Not exactly. And certainly not to begin with. But the longer I spent in the presence of these things the more I began to think about them and the place they occupied in my life. To begin with this was more of a practical than any form of intellectual exercise. The primary task was decluttering my life and deciding what to keep and what to throw away. At one point I even found myself reading Marie Kondo’s book

'*The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying: A simple, effective way to banish clutter forever*' (Kondo, 2014).

DAMARELL:

As not everyone will be familiar with Marie Kondo's books and ideas, perhaps you could say a little about who she is and the approach to decluttering she advocates?

EDWARDS:

Marie Kondo is a best-selling author and lifestyle guru who has transformed getting rid of stuff into a way of life. Based on traditional Japanese values, through applying her KonMari Method™ our approach to decluttering will, we are told, forever change the way we tidy and live[11]. For Marie Kondo 'life tidying' is a process whereby anything that fails to 'spark joy' is to be touched, thanked and ceremonially sent on its way towards a better life elsewhere, where it can discover a more appreciative owner.

DAMARELL:

How is the decluttering going by the way?

EDWARDS:

Let's just say it remains a work in progress Barrie.

DAMARELL:

And are you still reading Marie Kondo and do you think a less conscious response to Kondo might underlie, in part, the exhibition project?

EDWARDS:

In the end reading Marie Kondo proved to be an unproductive digression. Moreover, following the KonMari Method she advocates requires a level of commitment and discipline I simply don't have. After a number of similar digressions, I did however eventually find my way to some of the literature on what

11 https://konmari.com [Accessed 31/01/2019]

academics refer to as 'material culture'[12]. Along the way I came across the writing of Deyan Sudjic – the Director of the Design Museum in London – whose ideas helped shape my own thinking about objects. I was particularly struck by a passage in his book *The Language of Things* where he writes, '*Objects are the way in which we measure out the passing of our lives. They are what we use to define ourselves, to signal who we are, and who we are not'* (Sudjic, 2009: 21).

DAMARELL:

This brings to mind both my return to, and in some sense, the retrieval of the analogue synthesis objects of my youth. My sense of work not yet finished seems, from Sudjic's perspective, to represent a kind of a void that deserves attention and possible reconstruction. Do you think he's right about that?

EDWARDS:

I do Barrie. In our day to day lives – self-consciously or not – we constantly signal who we are to others through our personal possessions; through the kind of mobile phone we carry or the jewellery we wear or the objects we choose to furnish our homes. In our working lives we may seek to do this through the clothes we wear or the tools of the trade we carry with us. The stethoscope would be a good example. As an object it has limited practical use, but over time has acquired considerable symbolic meaning.

DAMARELL:

What symbol do you think an art therapist might usefully adopt?

12 Footnote 12 - Material culture is the term used to describe the physical aspect of culture as found in the **objects** and architecture that surround people. This includes usage, consumption, creation, and trade of objects as well as the behaviours, norms, and rituals that the objects create or take part in. The term is commonly used in archaeological and anthropological studies, specifically focusing on the material evidence that can be attributed to culture in the past or present;
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Material_culture [Accessed 31/01/2019]

EDWARDS:

When I started working as an art therapist in a large psychiatric hospital in the early 1980s, I made a conscious decision to wear casual clothes rather than a suit. It was also my decision not to wear a white coat. A decision that marked me out as different from most of my colleagues and, of course, the patients. As you might imagine, this didn't always play well as it blurred the distinction between staff and patient, us and them. Perhaps that's less of an issue for art therapists working today than it once was, but the principle of using objects – including items of clothing – to signal our differences or affiliations still applies, I think.

DAMARELL:

What you say reminds me how easy it can be to forget how much the world has changed since we trained and entered the profession.

EDWARDS:

When the format for the exhibition began to take shape in my mind one of the things I wanted it to do was reflect the passing of time. This was one of the reasons I invited art therapists at the beginning of their career to contribute to the exhibition, along with those who – like yourself – have retired from it. It's all too easy to forget sometimes that during the early years of our careers we worked without mobile phones, laptop computers, access to the internet or email. While it may be tempting to apply a nostalgic wash over the past, the world we live and work in today is profoundly different to what it was when we entered the profession. It was an analogue rather than a digital world back then.

DAMARELL:

You seem to be suggesting that this exhibition has elements of nostalgia regarding our personal attachment to objects.

EDWARDS:

Nostalgia? Possibly, but not in any negative sense. The exhibition certainly contained a number of objects that while being of personal importance are also, I would suggest, of historical interest. Who amongst us now uses a typewriter to write a letter or a Roneo machine to print off multiple copies of documents? And

yet each of these objects has – in its own way – played a part not only in our personal lives but in the development of art therapy too. For those of us who can remember using these objects their presence in this exhibition serves to demonstrate only too painfully how quickly the present can become seemingly ancient history. At the heart of this exhibition are questions concerning our personal – often intimate – relationship with objects and, with the passage of time, the meaning these objects come to assume in our personal and professional lives.

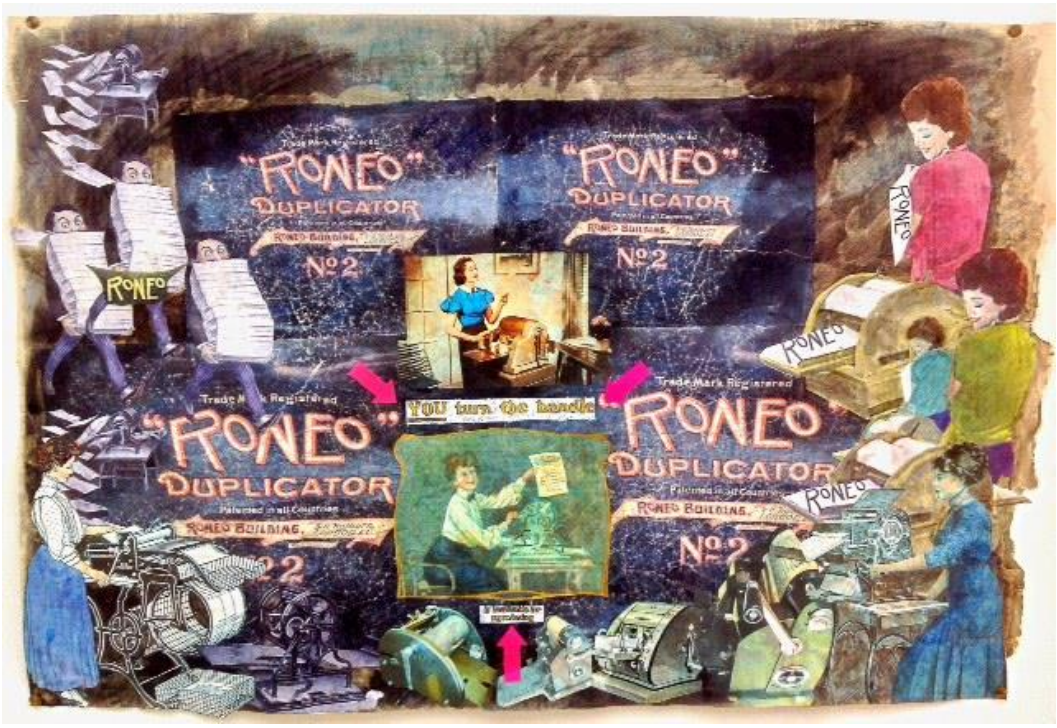


Fig. 7 – ‘You turn the handle’, Andy Gilroy

DAMARELL:

Objects like the smart phone, iPad and laptop are clearly important to us, often in ways that aren’t always immediately obvious. It interested me how some of the images in the exhibition referenced, in some way, the material staples of art therapy practice. Materials such as paint, pastel, pencil and charcoal found in art therapy rooms across the land wouldn’t have been out of place in a renaissance studio. Whilst other contributors works interestingly reflected the use of modern media. This seemed to me to represent a development in art therapy practice at an important material level.

EDWARDS:

I think so Barrie. As Michele Wood's contribution to the exhibition clearly demonstrates these objects can open up all manner of creative possibilities. Having initially regarded the idea of using a smartphone in her work as an artist and an art therapist as 'gimmicky and restrictive' Michele found her views challenged by her clients – mainly people living with terminal illnesses – many of whom use iPads, tablet computers and their smartphones to maintain their creativity and social connections.

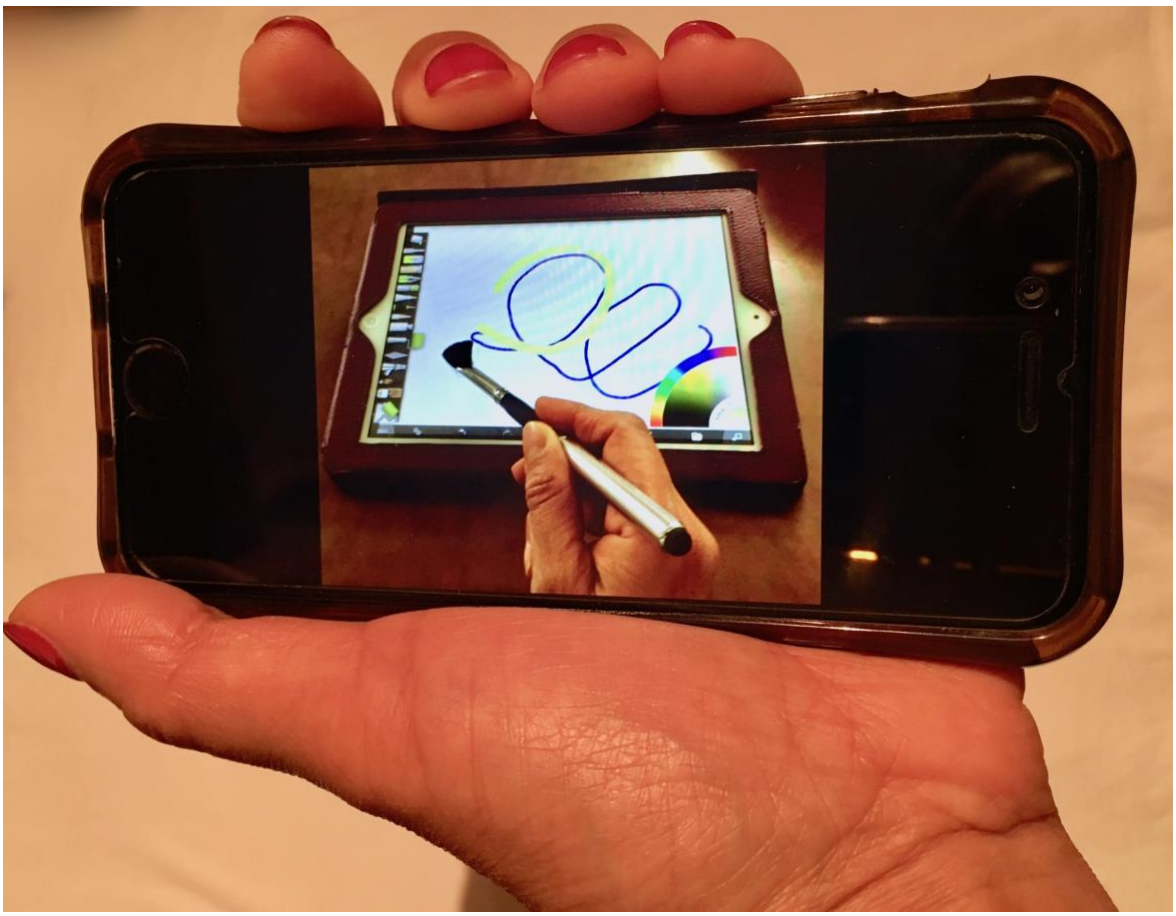


Fig. 8 – 'Smartphone', Michele Wood

DAMARELL:

How we relate to each other and how we think about the world in which we work and live has been, and no doubt will continue to be, profoundly shaped by these and other objects.

EDWARDS:

Absolutely! My own thinking about this was much influenced by a book I discovered by chance prior to the exhibition; *Evocative Objects: Things We Think With*, edited by Sherry Turkle (2011). In the introduction Turkle writes, '*We find it familiar to consider objects as useful or aesthetic, as necessities or vain indulgences. We are on less familiar ground when we consider objects as companions to our emotional lives or as provocations to thought*' (Turkle, 2011: 5).

DAMARELL:

So, let me get this right, objects might not only have practical applications or provide aesthetic pleasure, they also have the capacity to evoke thoughts as well as feelings, not unlike Christopher Bollas suggests?

EDWARDS:

What I think Turkle is arguing is that through our relationship with things (objects) thoughts and feelings become inseparable. As Sherry Turkle puts it, '*We think with the objects we love; we love the objects we think with*' (Turkle, 2011: 5). Through structuring it in the way I did, I wanted the exhibition to bring our thoughts and feelings about objects together. I wanted the exhibition to explore visually, as well as through words, our emotional, as well as our intellectual responses to a miscellaneous collection of art therapy related objects.

DAMARELL:

Would you say objects such as those included in the exhibition are of anything more than merely personal interest?

EDWARDS:

I think so, yes. Once selected and displayed on a gallery wall everyday objects such as a biscuit tin, a handbag, a paint box, a new box of crayons, a well-used

camera are transformed into something extraordinary and significant. Each contributor to the exhibition shared an object that has played a significant role in their personal and professional development. Each object comes with a story and each story forms part of the collective history of art therapy.

Fig. 9 – ‘Biscuit Tin’, Cecilie Browne

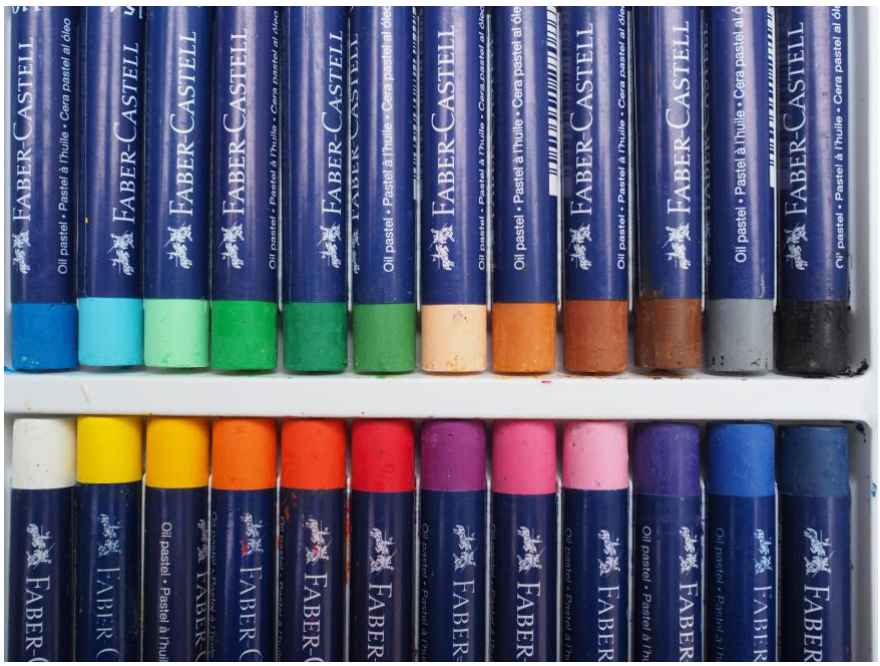


Fig. 10 – ‘‘Skin’ and pigment’, Barrie Damarell

DAMARELL:

Let's park that idea for the moment and return to your decision to mount an exhibition rather than say write an article. Dave, you're well known for your writing, could you say something about the thinking behind that decision?

EDWARDS:

I came to feel that mounting an exhibition provided the most conducive environment in which to articulate and explore my developing interest in objects. Curating an exhibition seemed particularly apt given the fact that objects have long played such an important role in the history of art.

DAMARELL:

Just think of all those artfully arranged 17th Century still life paintings featuring all manner of foodstuffs and objects, each rendered in intricate detail.

EDWARDS:

These objects may have been painted in order to display and celebrate the status and material affluence of wealthy patrons, but they were also highly symbolic. Fast forward to today and we find that the very idea of what Art – with a capital A – is – or can be – is inextricably bound up with the depiction or use of material objects. Ever since the French artist Marcel Duchamp exhibited a urinal in 1917 under the title *Fountain* avant-garde artists have asserted that the significance of an art work resides not in how it was made or by whom, but in the use to which it has been put and the meaning or significance attributed to it.

DAMARELL:

In what ways do you think this change of emphasis regarding the depiction and use of material objects influenced your work as an artist and as an art therapist?

EDWARDS:

It is an ironic fact of my life that by the time I arrived at art college in the early 1970s painting was deemed to be dead and cutting-edge art had more or less dematerialised, taking the form of conceptual and performance-based art. It was the idea, the concept that mattered. As a young man interested in painting this

presented something of an intellectual and emotional challenge, to say the least. I suddenly felt as though I was swimming against the tide and drowning, not waving.

DAMARELL:

It sounds like that was a difficult period in your life. I am particularly drawn to this personal experience of yours and possible associations to your sense of individuality and 'unconformity'? Both of which, might be active below the surface of this exploration of art therapy?

EDWARDS:

It was a difficult period. It didn't stop me painting or drawing of course, but it did leave me feeling that doing so was marginal, outmoded and more or less meaningless. In response, I began to look for ways of making art that had a social purpose; a search that eventually led me to art therapy.

DAMARELL:

As a way of beginning to draw this conversation to a close, I wondered whether you wanted to say anything further about the history of art therapy?

EDWARDS:

When I settled on the title '*A personal history of Art Therapy in less than 100 objects*' for the exhibition, the thought occurred to me that the exhibition might provide the art therapy profession with a timely provocation. The intention was to create a space in which an unofficial or alternative history of art therapy might be told through objects collected, made or used by its practitioners or proponents rather transmitted by those in positions of power or authority. History, as the saying goes, tends to be written by the victors and this, it seems to me, is as true for the history of art therapy as it is for any other professional discipline. The authority to define or sanction the truth of history tends to reside in professional associations or published academic texts. I wanted to challenge that.

DAMARELL:

Having contributed to the 'official' history of art therapy through your own writing on art therapy and most obviously through your book (Edwards, 2013) I imagine

this is quite a difficult issue for you?

EDWARDS:

Mea culpa! I stand before you as a guilty party. Whether our intention is to convey the truth or obscure it, the telling of any history will always be partial. This exhibition was conceived, to some extent at least, as a belated attempt on my part to redress the balance a little and enable other voices to emerge.

DAMARELL:

You did however choose who was invited to contribute.

EDWARDS:

I did, and I'm sure my choices did, consciously or unconsciously, reflect my interests and allegiances. Nevertheless, I didn't select any of the work included in the exhibition or edit what was written about it. Those decisions were – rightly I think – left entirely to individual contributors such as yourself.

DAMARELL:

Any final thoughts?

EDWARDS:

Firstly, I'd like to thank everyone who contributed to the exhibition – including yourself Barrie – and to express my gratitude to all those who came to see it. I'd also like to take this opportunity to let it be known that this particular project continues in the form of an online archive. Anyone wishing to contribute an object of their own, or to see and read about the objects included in the original exhibition, can do so by visiting the Curating Art Therapy website at https://curatingarttherapy.blogspot.com/2018/09/. It is also possible for visitors to the site to share their thoughts on the objects to be found there.

DAMARELL:

Thank you.

David Edwards

David Edwards trained as an art therapist at Goldsmiths College, graduating in 1982. Since qualifying he has worked in a range of clinical and educational settings; mainly with adults. His book '*Art Therapy*' was first published by Sage in 2004. A second edition was published in 2013. Semi-retired, David currently works mainly as a clinical supervisor in private practice in Sheffield.

Barrie Damarell

Barrie retired five years ago after working with people with learning disabilities for thirty years. He has published several journal articles and book chapters. He also served on the editorial boards of The International Journal of Art Therapy: Inscape, and, until recently, ATOL: Art Therapy Online. He lives in Devon.

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